

Preface

During the original master plan activities that lead to the 2005 rendition of the plan, Plymouth Hall was designated as a potential future home for an Arts Center. The final representation for support of the arts on the campus is indicated in Note 1 on page 8 of the 2005 Master Plan executive summary.

“Includes Town Hall, High School Academy and Parks & Recreation – Cultural Building (either Plymouth or new building).”

The plan also includes an addendum, Exhibit B, describing the various buildings. The description for Plymouth Hall includes:

“Plymouth Hall certainly has unique attributes relative to the remaining campus. The auditorium space and the arts and crafts related spaces lend this structure to be a community based Cultural and performing Arts Center. The renovated auditorium could help fill the need for such space within the community. Although this building lacks some of the character and richness in other Fairfield Hills buildings, a tastefully done renovation could define an enjoyable experience. The court within the gymnasium at Plymouth, however, is far smaller than a regulation size. Furthermore, this part of the structure is in need of repair. This is an area of the building that could be demolished and rebuilt to serve a similar purpose correctly.”

As of 2009, the focus for implementing the arts portion of the plan appears to be to provide a Band Stand in the West Meadow (the intersection of Wasserman and Mile Hill South), at an estimated cost of \$3,750,000, based on the October 22, 2009 handout for the Board of Finance meeting. Jennifer Johnston, the chair of the Cultural Arts Commission, is requesting that the original plans for an Arts Center be addressed again. From an arts perspective, the money identified for the bandstand in the Fairfield Hills Authority CIP request is better used for the Arts Center, because of both its ability to operate year round and its support of a wider array of arts, including performance, classes, galleries, etc.

Current arts groups that would likely be interested in participating with the Arts Center include:

- Friends of Music
- Society of Creative Arts of Newtown (SCAN)
- Flagpole Photographers
- Perhaps, Town Players (already have venue, though)

The model envisioned for the Arts Center is based on the Ridgefield Playhouse, both in terms of audience (regional) and economics (ticket sales). This revenue is expected to offset costs in a very short time period (5 years). [Jennifer will gather more information on the current revenue model and amount that the Ridgefield Playhouse garners and will talk with regional arts organizations re: the competitive environment.] In addition to funding the construction of an Arts Center through the town's CIP processes, funds can also be raised via state/federal grants and local fundraising – though the cost of local venues typically takes a big bite out of fundraising profits.

Why Fairfield Hills

- Centralized location
- Access to 84 – the Arts Center is intended to have a regional scope
- Plymouth Hall has an auditorium with about 800 seats that can be leveraged

Status Quo

- Mission: Support the arts in Newtown, includes helping local non-profits. Manage an arts calendar – with budget of \$2000 per year.
 - Cultural Arts Commission arose as a “byproduct” of the involvement with FFH. At the time, other area towns were studied, re: organizations to support the arts.
- Use of Edmond Town Hall.
 - Current costs prohibitive, in part due to conflicts with movies. It costs \$3200 per day on weekends and \$2500 per evening on weekday evenings.
 - Size is inadequate, both stage and seating
 - Infrastructure (electrical, lighting) insufficient
 - Timing difficult, given Edmond is highly utilized

Needs

- 800-1000 seats
- Large indoor stage
- Theater as opposed to an “auditorium.” I.e., architecture, esthetics, infrastructure
- Access to highway, given regional focus
- Parking
- Quiet location (away from Wasserman), for both the Arts Center and an outdoor venue
- Full time person to manage scheduling

Points to Ponder

- Potentially long-term revenue generation
- Improves access of community to wide assortment of arts
- Act as an anchor for an annual arts festival modeled on the Common Ground Country Fair of Maine (??, see <http://www.mofga.org/TheFair/tabid/135/Default.aspx>)
 - Local artists
 - Music
 - Dance
 - Organic Farmers
 - Recycled arts contest
 - Fireworks
- Synergistic with other uses, re: space, schedules, etc.
- Needs a full-time person to manage scheduling
- Need to work out the numbers, re: costs and expected income

Extensions

The Performing Arts Building could be supplemented in two ways to further increase the opportunities for bring the arts to the campus. First, an outdoor venue could be added on a town green for outdoor concerts and art shows. Such a venue should be away from Wasserman, given traffic noise issues. Second, the campus could be the home for a wider “Arts Campus” that would include the Arts Center at Plymouth (or a replacement building), Stratford, the duplexes for “artists in residence” and an outdoor area extending into West Meadow.